1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

342

346
241

Above: A LEPCHA HOUSE

Below: A *MOONG LI:* A HOUSE FOR THE 'HOUSE-GOBLIN' *THYAK-DUM*, SITUATED IN A CARDAMUM FIELD; BEHIND ANOTHER HOUSE

[facing p. 60]

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

intestines—the heart, liver and lungs, the *shafot*—are cooked with rice and offered to *Thyak-dum* together with three *patyoot* of fresh *chi*. *Thyak-dum* is partially attached to the house, and partially to the inhabitants thereof; that is to say that people coming into a new house would have to exorcise him were they able to do so; but if the old inhabitants had moved to another dwelling *Thyak-dum* would accompany them, spending most of his time with them, but occasionally returning to his and their old home. This last point is almost purely theoretical, for it very very seldom happens that Lepchas change their homes. If a house proved consistently unlucky, with many people dying and nothing prospering, and if it were divined that the house was the cause of these disasters, the survivors might move; but although some houses in Lingthem had had far more than their share of death and misfortune the inhabitants still stayed in them. The only reason for which houses were actually abandoned was loneliness, because the few survivors preferred to live with relations rather than cope with the work alone.

V

In front of each Lepcha house is a field fenced in with bamboo; it is called the garden (*sing*), and in it are raised those vegetables and roots which are used for flavouring food. These however are only grown in small quantities on the edge, and the greater part of the field is sown with grain crops; first of all barley and spring wheat mixed, which ripens in April, and subsequently maize. This garden is the only portion of Lepcha land which receives animal manure; it is against the house, under which domestic animals shelter at night; their dung is collected and thrown over the fence. At the bottom of nearly every garden is a plantation of bamboos, cultivated so as to have an easily available supply of this invaluable material. Near the house too are usually a small number of fruit trees—oranges, peaches, apples, pears, plums, tree-tomatoes—and occasionally one or two shrubs, usually roses, are grown for their flowers.

The rest of the land of the household is scattered all over the surrounding district, and it is seldom that people own the land near their house. All possess some strips of land—often more than a dozen for a single household—on the warmer lower slopes of the valley, where the climate is suitable for the cultivation of wet rice, cardamum, and some of the earlier millets or eleusines.

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

241 The big fields, which are cleared by burning once every eight years, where the main crops of dry rice, buckwheat and millet are raised, are mostly above the level of the houses; so that it is by no means unusual for people to have fields three or more miles away from their houses, and three thousand feet higher up or lower down the mountain side. Consequently field-houses are built for 241 those periods when there is heavy work to be done in the fields— 342 either weeding, or chasing away predatory birds and beasts from the ripening crops, or harvesting. In the permanent cultivations down in the valley these field-houses are solidly built structures, consisting only of a single room but otherwise in all respects similar to the ordinary Lepcha house. In some cases they are permanently inhabited by one or two members of a household either for reasons of health or because they do not agree too well with the other members. These field-houses however are built at any time without any ceremony for the selection of the site or at any time in the course of construction; and they are not included in the house-tax. The field-houses in the temporary cultivations are very flimsy affairs chiefly made out of matting.

481 The extremely precipitous nature of the ground renders travelling extremely difficult for Europeans who are accustomed to levelled paths and who walk shod. The Lepchas, owing to long habit, are magnificent walkers and climbers, and can cover enormous distances without apparent fatigue or breathlessness. I found the descent to the river which I made one day to witness the repairing of the bamboo bridge—a descent of about three thousand feet in a mile and a half—and the return therefrom, almost exhausting; the Lepchas will make the same journey without discomfort two or three times a day. Their physical strength and agility is amazing; [482] over paths, or rather tracks, where experienced mountaineers need to use both hands, the Lepchas will carry heavy loads on their backs. Indeed one day Chala Mandal, the head of the village, after he had been recounting semi-legendary, semi-historical stories of the past exploits of the Lepchas, said with a deprecating smile 'Nowadays all the Lepchas are good for is carrying loads.'

vi

776 Writers about Sikkim and Tibet who incidentally mention the Lepchas refer to them with surprising unanimity as 'animists'; and the references to devils' habitations in the desiderata for a house-

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

hunting of any other animal); if this rule is not observed the bears will escape from their trap unharmed. Bear skins and also their gall bladders which are much sought after by the Chinese as aphrodisiacs (they fetch Rs. 5 apiece in Kalimpong) were an inducement to catch these animals when money was not plentiful or non-existent; nowadays with money from cardamum there is less economic justification for taking the risks involved. Catching small birds in snares does not count as hunting; it is one of the commonest pursuits of boys after the age of about eight, who take their catches home as presents for their mother.

ii

The agricultural land in Zongu can be divided into two categories: the land under permanent cultivation, and the land which is cleared for crops once in every eight years. The permanent cultivation is of three types; there is the *sing* or field-garden against the house, cardamum fields and rice terraces. The two latter types of cultivation, which are now of very great importance in Lepcha life, are both very modern: cardamum was introduced at the beginning of the century, rice terraces for wet paddy less than twenty years ago. Potentially this permanent cultivation has introduced a new note into Lepcha life, though so far the effect is not noticeable. Both cardamum fields and rice terraces demand a certain amount of hard initial labour, after which they acquire, as it were, a capital value; this is less true of cardamum, which needs replanting every ten years, than of the rice terraces; to build these a considerable amount of work is needed, but once they are made a heavy crop can be raised from them with relatively little labour.

Until the beginning of this century the wealth of a Lepcha household depended on the energy of its members and on the proportion of able-bodied adults to dependants—children and the old and invalid—; if there was more than one dependent to one able-bodied adult life was liable to be rather hard. Nowadays it is theoretically possible that a lazy heir of industrious ancestors might be in a better position in the community than his own industry warranted. Formerly the inevitable rule of Lepcha economy was 'from each according to his ability; to each according to his work', tempered by the co-operation and willing help which was and is freely given to those afflicted by temporary or permanent

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

has at least a couple of terraces and some considerably more. These terraces are scattered all over the valley, and it is rare for two contiguous strips to belong to the same owner. It is theoretically permissible to exchange plots so that they shall be better grouped, but nobody considers doing so.

The rice terraces are turned with a rough single-pointed wooden plough drawn by a pair of oxen, as is the *sing* or field-garden near the house. Except on these artificially levelled places the ground is too precipitous for the use of a plough to be possible. Two main crops are raised in the field-garden annually; first a mixture of barley and wheat, and subsequently maize. These grains are chiefly raised as stop-gap crops, and for fermenting; maize is thought little of, and to eat much of it is the surest sign of poverty. A number of fruits and vegetables are also raised on the edge of the field-garden to give a variety of flavourings to the main rice dish; the greater number of these are importations from India, such as various varieties of pulse, tomatoes and chilli; some of them however are wild plants found locally and domesticated; such are various lavatera, arums and alliums. The collection of some of these wild plants have some ritual attached to them; the allium *safyou* for example, which is only found in one place, must be dug up with sharpened sticks; if knives are used the supernatural Jamfi *moong* will be angry and throw sticks at the collectors and cause hail and thunder. Even more unpleasant is the mountain plant *chok-li bi* (probably a sort of rhubarb) which is said to be delicious; however you gather that plant hail will fall as the stems are picked.

Cardamum is grown in small clearings all over the lower slopes of the valley. It is a perennial plant propagated by cuttings which are taken in the early spring; the plant reaches its full bearing period within three years; at the end of ten years it starts to decline and new plantings have to be made; this can however be done on the same ground as the plant does not exhaust the soil. The plants need a good deal of care, and have to be hand-weeded at least three times a year, for the buds and fruit form close to the ground. When the fruit is gathered the old growth is cut down and burned. Cardamum plants are a favourite hiding-place for snakes. For the Lepchas cardamum is a foreign importation from Nepal; they always refer to it by its Nepali name—*elaiji*—and with the cultivation of the plant has come a whole complex of alien beliefs and ritual. Nothing is done when the

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

Work in the fields, whether sowing, weeding or harvesting, 241
nearly always done in large parties. These parties are made up
irtly of relations by blood or marriage, and partly by friends. Since 476
e Lepchas trace relationship back nine generations on the father's 601
de and at least four on the mother's there is a tendency for most
llagers to have some relationship; I should guess that out of a
ozen Lepchas of Lingthem taken by chance, a relationship chain
uld be established between eight of them. But this relationship
not necessary for field-helpers; in nearly all the lists I made there
ere a few people quite unrelated.

Help in the fields is always repaid with a similar amount of 241
bour; for sowing and weeding the helpers are also always given 476
meal with meat. At harvesting a meal need not be given to people
ho volunteer their services, but must be given to those who
e asked to help. At harvest payment is given in kind: forty
fifty pounds of rice to an adult worker, a big basket of millet
maize, thirty to forty pounds of buckwheat. Children are
ven proportionately less. The first person to harvest his dry
ce, and the last to harvest the wet, must make a small present
the grain to all the other householders. Because cardamum
a money-producing and not a food-producing crop help with
is paid for in money; a rupee a head is given for work in the [465]
elds and Rs. 3/– for carrying a maund[8] to market.

iv

The most general food of the Lepchas is rice. This is prepared 252
four main ways; boiled whole after husking in water and 262
ten with meat or vegetables or other seasoning; boiled whole
milk; 'puffed', or ground fine and made into a pudding. This
round-rice pudding is often given to children. Wheat and maize
ay be eaten in the same way if there is no rice, but they are not
ked. Buckwheat is ground and mixed with water and baked on the

[8] The *maund*, which is divided into 40 *seers* is the current measure of weight
India. A maund is meant to represent the load one man can lift, and its
uivalent in European measure depends partly on *what* is measured, and
rtly on *where* it is measured. (Similar confusion can be found in various
glish measures of agricultural produce such as a bushel, or a truss.) On the
dian railways a maund is equated to 80 lbs., which makes the seer 2 lbs.
he Lepchas have their own measures according to the size of the basket [804]
ed. Since all these measures are very rough I have generally given an
proximate equivalent in lbs. avoirdupois.

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

CHAPTER NINE

RELIGION III: THE PEOPLE OF MAYEL

i

I stated earlier that the Lepchas have two or perhaps three religions. My reason for this statement is that the ritual connected with harvesting and hunting, though performed by Mun, have a number of features which do not occur elsewhere. It seems to me possible that the worship of the people of Mayel, and perhaps of Pong *rum* the god of hunters, is of a different origin to the other Mun ceremonies; unfortunately too little is known about the ritual of neighbouring tribes to enable profitable speculation to be made as to whether either or both ceremonies are relatively modern importations from outside, or whether they are on the contrary the oldest Lepcha customs. The most outstanding differences with other Mun ritual, and indeed with ordinary Lepcha life, is, first, a discrimination against women, secondly, an insistance on virginity for some of the celebrants, and thirdly a suggestion of the danger of menstruating women. Women may perform the sacrifice to the people of Mayel, but if they do so the ceremony is curtailed and fewer objects employed; they not only cannot sacrifice to Pong *rum* but must not even be aware when the sacrifice takes place; and the popped corn and *chi* which are employed in it, if not made by a man, which is preferable, must be made by a virgin girl. The chief offerings to the people of Mayel are the *lafét* sacrifice and *sakyou faat*; the small bird for the *lafét* must be killed by a virgin boy, and the strained *chi* poured into the buttered cup by a virgin girl.

This insistance upon virginity is unparalleled in Lepcha life;[1]

[1] The only other instance is in the sacrifice to a pair of demons who cause a coughing disease (? tuberculosis) and whose presence and ritual were divined and by a Nandjému less than ten years ago. For this ceremony the popped corn must be made by a virgin girl, and the Mun must fast for twenty-four hours before the sacrifice. Only two people know how to perform this very modern importation.

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

241 785 indeed Lepchas have no word for 'virgin' and either have to say 'clean' or else directly 'a person who has not copulated.' They claim that this insistence on virginity in connection with the objects of sacrifice for the people of Mayel is a custom derived from their father's fathers; if the special bird were not killed and if the killer and the *chi*-pourer were not virgins the gods would be angry and the harvest spoiled. But, as so often in Lepcha life, theory and practice do not necessarily coincide; young children [781] are chosen to fill the rôles who it is hoped are virgin; if not—*ket ma-nin*: it doesn't matter.

776 The people of Mayel consist of seven brothers each with their own name and each patron of some sort of grain. These seven brothers are the progenitors and ancestors and guardians of the Lepchas. They were created by Itpomu who placed rice and millet and maize in their charge when she made these crops. The people of Mayel live in seven huts; they are immortal; each morning they are infants, at midday they are grown men and in the evening they are old. They all have huge goitres and it is from them that people know that big goitres are a sign of prosperity and a large harvest. They wear the traditional Lepcha costume of clothes made of nettle cloth and small basket-work hats. They are somewhere between the gods and ordinary human beings; they are not gods because they live on earth but they are not human because they do not die. The land of Mayel is far up the Talung valley, somewhere behind Kinchenjunga; at one time in the past the road thither was open but now it has been closed and is as unpassable as the cutting edge of a knife. On the road to Mayel are three guardian spirits called Sok-po, who are brothers; the eldest is called Mayel Yook *rum*; he is also called Pong *rum* when hunters sacrifice to him; his younger brothers Mi-tik and Tom-tik are cruel deities who kill and eat men and animals; Tom-tik is like a bear. They are the special guardians of the ibex and musk deer which come from Mayel, which is the reason why these animals are so difficult to kill.

In the country of Mayel crops grow a hundred times as big as here and it is from that country that the seeds of our present crops originate. These crops are always ripe for harvesting. The migratory birds are called Mayel *fo*, birds of Mayel, and they are sent out by the people of Mayel to the Lepchas to indicate the seasons and the times when the various agricultural acts should be performed. When the time comes for the migratory birds to return to Mayel the parent birds die on the way and only the newly hatched ones

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

776 stayed there seven days and when he went away the people of Mayel asked him not to talk about them when he returned; and they gave him as gifts rice seed which he sowed and the fruit of pumpkin and cucumber which turned into stone.

Another hunter from Sakhyong also found his way there but he was not so fortunate. When he came to the village he found a child and asked him 'Who are your father and mother?' The child said 'We are our own fathers and mothers, we are babies and young people and old people'. The man then picked and cooked some rice. When the people came near he threatened them with his knife. At this they said to him 'Do not do that; cook and eat your rice and go away. If you do not we will drive you away with our dogs'. When they said that he looked round and saw huge dogs like bears with enormous eyes. Then he was very frightened and ran away at once with some of the cooked rice in his hand. As he ran home there was a terrific thunderstorm, and he was pelted with snow and hail. Since the time of these adventurous travellers the road has been closed with an enormous rock.

ii

241 The people of Mayel are worshipped exclusively in connection with the crops of dry rice, millet and maize; on all other occasions they are markedly excluded from the long lists of supernaturals who are called on to partake of the sacrifices and give their blessings. Everybody must worship them on two occasions, after the completion of sowing and at the harvesting of the dry rice; in those houses where there is a Mun or a knowledgeable old man they are also prayed to in the winter to keep away snow and hail, in the spring to protect young crops, and, after the sowing of each of their grains, they are offered *sakyou faat* to ensure a good harvest. Only the three crops are connected with the people of Mayel; the others come from different supernaturals. Barley, wheat, buckwheat and wet rice come from Kongsen-bu, the God of Kinchenjunga, a Sikkimese deity; no important ceremonies are connected with these crops. Cardamum, as has already been said[2] comes from Nepal and is under the patronage of the foreign Elaiji-*nyou*, who dislikes women, in particular menstruating women. The people of Mayel are said to share this dislike, and should a menstruating woman visit them there would be the terrible result that all the

[2] See Chapter Three, p. 92.

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

people of Mayel would fall asleep and would not send the migratory birds. There is a fairly vague tradition that menstruating women should not approach the flowering plants which bear the fruit that the people of Mayel sell—pumpkins, cucumbers, egg-plants and chillies—or the plants will rot.[3] Opinion about this prohibition was very mixed; some people, especially those who have had much contact with other races, think there may be some truth in the matter, while the more conservative, such as the Mandal, think the statement ridiculous.

The preliminary ceremonies, in those houses where they are held, are small repetitions of the big ceremony after the sowing of all the grains which must be held in each house. It is considered desirable that the same people should officiate in each ceremony, and also that the woman who sings in the spring should take the rôle of Talyeu-mu at the harvesting, and, if possible that the sacrificer should take the rôle of Mayel-mu. If the sacrificer is a woman this of course cannot be done.

The spring offerings consist of the *lafét* sacrifice and *sakyou faat*. The food on the *lafét* is divided into three lines of three heaps each; the centre line is for the people of Mayel, that on the right for all men's patron gods, and especially those of the house-father, that on the left for all women's patron gods, and especially those of the house-mother. The dried bird's flesh in the *lafét* must be a special very small bird which has been killed by a virgin boy; if bigger birds are used or if the boy is not a virgin the gods will be displeased and will not eat and there will be a bad harvest. If the sacrificer is a man there is also offered a *taming* which consists of a long stick to which are attached tiny parcels containing every sort of crop and also tiny *patyoot* of *chi*; this is suspended from the roof above the officiant's head. Before the ceremony begins a song is sung in honour of the people of Mayel and then the Mun offers to them *sakyou faat* and powdered portions of the objects on the *lafét*, calling on the people of Mayel to accept the offerings and throwing them before him or her on to the floor. The cup is constantly re-filled with *chi* with a wooden ladle by a young virgin girl who is sitting beside the Mun. After that everybody except the Mun officiating has to drink some strained *chi* from the buttered cup and eat a part of the offerings and sing songs in honour of the people of Mayel; those people who do not or cannot sing them-

[3] I am told that this is a formal rule among the Nepali, who also consider that these fruit should never be pointed at with the finger.

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

241 782 selves will give a small present to the Mun who will sing for all of them. The grain which is used in this sacrifice has to be specially ripened in the sun in the same way as the grain for seed is ripened. This completes the ceremony of sowing and it is always followed by a feast in which meat is eaten.

The ceremony of harvesting is far more complicated. It is only employed for the dry rice. When the dry rice is ripe a little is picked to be prepared for *chi* and when the *chi* is ready the owner of the field summons all his friends and they go together to pick [753] rice. Until the ceremony is completed nobody, not even children, may pick any grain or he would get ill; if anybody gets stomach-ache at that period people will say that he has picked rice before it was harvested.

It is necessary to have ready beforehand the smoke-dried *tafoot* of a pig. The *tafoot* would seem to be the gall-bladder or spleen; it is round and has a white smelly liquid inside and is found near the bladder, but in pigs and musk deer it is said to be found near the penis at the end. On the day of reaping this *tafoot* is taken up to the field of dry rice together with two burning brands from the house-fire and also a *patyoot* of *chi* made from the new rice. When the party arrives, a place in the centre of the field is chosen as the *ʒo-lam* (the place where the crops are heaped); some rice-plants in the centre of the *ʒo-lam* are tied together into a sheaf and then the two burning brands will be held above them and on these a piece of the *tafoot* will be put. Then an old and experienced man—not the owner of the field but any one of his workers—will be chosen to represent a man of Mayel (called for the ceremony Mayel-mu) and he will blow on the *tafoot* and speak; while this is done a special measuring basket is held upside down over the brand. The old man will summon the gods and the ancestors and will say 'Come and see the smoke; burr—burr—burr—burr'. Then all the people present will repeat, 'burr—burr—burr'. By this invocation it is hoped that the gods will come and bring back all the grain eaten by wild birds and animals.

Standing by the speaker is a woman not directly connected with the field owner, who has been chosen for the day to represent Talyeu-mu, one of the earth sisters. When Mayel-mu has finished his invocation the measuring basket is put on his back and Talyeu-mu cuts the tied grain and puts it in the basket. Then Talyeu-mu and Mayel-mu, who acts as her load carrier, go round the *ʒo-lam* cutting a basket of rice for Talyeu-mu; at the same time

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

241 ● 782

the others cut two baskets of rice for the people of Mayel. When the three baskets have been cut four or five reed mats are put down on the flattened ground and all dance on the rice to separate the grain from the chaff. All the dances are round dances and semi-acrobatic, consisting chiefly of hopping and jumping; nine different types are recognised and three rounds of each type are danced in turn. After the dancing Talyeu-mu goes round the edge of the field cutting another basket while all the other reapers work in a row to fill two more baskets which are heaped up like the first; after these have been put on the *ʒo-lam* the *nam-toak* (potential curse) is lifted and all can cut as they like; but during the whole day Talyeu-mu and Mayel-mu cut apart from the others. When the second heap of rice has been poured on to the *ʒo-lam* a fence is erected to the south of it consisting of three leafy saplings joined by a bamboo; on it a mat is hung and then from the three posts are fastened three bundles of rice-plants, ears downwards, hanging over the mat. After this fence is set up the *patyoot* of new *chi* is placed against it and Mayel-mu offers it with an invocation. Then at the four corners of the *ʒo-lam* are erected four posts of a sort of reed or bamboo; the top part is split into three and the two side pieces are bent down to make loops.

When the *ʒo-lam* has been completed all do as they like; some gather rice, some dance, some drink *chi* and so on. The harvesting must be completed before the sun has touched the hills; if all is not cut by then the work must go on the next day and the people must spend the night on the harvest field, as will be explained lower down. Right at the end must be gathered another three baskets of rice which must be completed at the same time; these three baskets are all emptied at the same time to the east of the heap and all present cry 'burr, burr, burr'. The rice is now put in eight heaps; that of the morning is put in the centre where the house-mother works; that of Talyeu-mu to the east and the other six heaps in a semi-circle to the north; these six heaps are named after six big mountains in the neighbourhood. Then the rice is separated from the chaff and straw partially by hand and partially by dancing; all work together at the different heaps except the house-mother and Talyeu-mu who work theirs by themselves. When all the rice is sifted the house-mother and Talyeu-mu push the heap of Talyeu-mu to the centre heap saying 'May the heap support us firmly and be as the sea'. After that all the other heaps are pushed into the centre, one after the other in due order. Then a wreath of rice

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

241 782 straw is placed on top of the big heap and on that three pieces of charcoal and then the *tafoot* is put on top. Then all except Mayel-mu withdraw and look on from afar and Mayel-mu makes a fixed invocation starting 'To—burr, burr, burr; you different gods, we summoned you this morning to bring the rice which grows like a tree and the maize which grows like a tree from Mayel. If storms have destroyed and wasted our crops bring that grain back, if birds or rats have destroyed or wasted our crops bring that grain back, burr, burr, burr.' After this all present say, 'burr, burr, burr', and he too will withdraw and watch to see if the grains of rice roll down off the heap; if they do it is a good sign; if not it means that the harvest will not last long. Then the charcoal and *tafoot* are taken away and the big basket of Talyeu-mu is used as a measure for the grain. If all this has been done while the sun is still high each helper is given his wage of about 30 lbs. of rice and goes back to the owner's house. There they drink *chi* and sing, Talyeu-mu competing against the rest; she will sing summoning the people of Mayel and the others will reply impersonating the gods, saying 'No, we won't come', and mocking her. As much *chi* as people can drink is given and everybody sleeps the night at the house.

241 786 If, however, the sun touches the hills before the rice is reaped another procedure is followed; the cut grain is covered with mats, a fireplace is set up and food cooked and the night is spent on the straw. On that night anybody may sleep with anyone else provided the rules of incest are not broken; and if a man should see his wife sleeping with another he must never refer to it, not even to his friends. There may only be two or three copulating couples, but it is better if there are more, for then Talyeu-Nimu and Sangvo-Nimu will be pleased at seeing so many people copulating and will send them a good harvest. If boys are too young to copulate they will just sleep with their friends. This ritual copulation is called *ʒo-tsom-thap* (pressing the rice; this is an elegant periphrasis for copulation). The rest of the rice is cut in the morning.

241 782 As soon as chi has been prepared the *lafèt* is offered with the new *chi* to the people of Mayel and all the people pray, saying 'May these crops feed us long'. After the sacrifice all must eat the new rice together; should any one person eat before the others he would be ill.

241 784 Until everybody in the neighbourhood has performed the sacrifice grain must not be dried in the sun, nor may people even

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

look at grain drying in the sun. Until that time grain must be dried over the fire; for if the gods of Mayel saw grain drying in the sun before they had been offered any they would be angry and would not come the next year and there would be a bad harvest. Until everybody has made the sacrifice people who go where they may see rice drying in the sun—across the river or to Mangan or Gangtok—must cover their face with a cloth. If a man who has not made his sacrifice were ordered by the Mandal to go abroad where he might see rice being dried, he would have a valid excuse for not going and a substitute would have to be found for him. Should a man by any chance see crops drying he would be considered to have *amik-her*, which is almost the evil eye; if a man with *amik-her* were to look on a field the people of Mayel would be terrified as if by an enemy and would run away and would not return next year. Therefore a man who has accidentally seen drying crops would live in the jungle or in a field-house or cardamum field until the rice of the neighbourhood was gathered; if he should be a person who would normally sacrifice he would not do so that year. To avoid this danger Lepchas who have to go to Mangan at the harvesting season only go at night so that they will see no drying crops. For a man with *amik-her* to look at the harvest would be *nam-toak*—a year of disaster—as bad as if incest had been committed. When people have performed their sacrifices they send and tell the Mandal who then sends the *gyapön* round with the message that now all have sacrificed and crops can be dried in the sun. All the inhabitants of Lingthem, Panung, Liklyang and Salim have to wait till they get the message before they can expose crops. Should anybody expose his crops before all were ready the Mandal would fine him Rs. 15; but such a case has not occurred in the last twenty years, though some are known of earlier. Besides dry rice, maize and three varieties of millet cannot be exposed to the sun. This prohibition does not apply to the other sorts of millets nor to barley, buckwheat, and wet rice. Grains must also not be exposed until a sort of wild grass which grows on the far side of the Talung river has turned yellow.

The Lepchas of Zongu are very serious about this prohibition on seeing drying crops in the sun; it is a custom which has descended from the ancestors of our ancestors. 'The people outside Zongu say they don't care; "the grain is in the sun when it is on the stalk; what is the difference when it is cut?" they say; but we people in Zongu have always acted in this way.' For Lepchas

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

241 784 living outside the closed community the prohibition is impossible to observe; the Lepchas of Zongu are well aware that there are good harvests where this prohibition is disregarded; but they consider that were *they* to neglect it their harvests would be bad as they live nearer the people of Mayel.

241 The people who represent Mayel-mu and Talyeu-mu when reaping are not paid any special honours; they represent the gods but they are not considered to have anything divine about them during this representation. For other crops there are not any elaborate ceremonies. When buckwheat is ripe a little of it is offered in the householder's house to Konchen, with an offering of buckwheat *chi*. 'The people of Sandong make a buckwheat cake and offer it but we don't.' At the time of planting the wet rice a general ceremony is performed in which a chicken or a goat is offered and also a plate with *chimi*, etc., on it; 'terraced rice comes from Nepal so it isn't really necessary to give thanks, but here we live near Mayel and it is better to be careful.' When a field is cleared in the forest for the first time a chicken is offered for each member of the household and also a plate with *chimi*, etc., to keep away illness and predatory animals. This ceremony can be performed by anybody who knows how to do so.

iii

224 782 For the annual sacrifice to Moot *rum* Tseu, who is also called Pong *rum*, the popped corn and *chi*, if not prepared by a man, which is more desirable, must be prepared by a virgin girl. Pong *rum* together with his wife Shing *rum*, is the lord of all wild animals and the patron saint of hunters. Every year in October a joint sacrifice has to be made to him by all the hunters of the neighbourhood; the sacrifice consists of popped corn, *chi*, dried fish and bird, ginger, arum root, some other tuber, sugar cane, banana and wormwood flowers. If possible all the prepared ingredients should be made by a man and no woman must witness the sacrifice or even know when it has been performed. Pong *rum*, it will be remembered, is the guardian of the road to Mayel.

In the forest as soon as an animal has been killed and cut up a sacrifice must be made to Pong *rum*. Big leaves are cut and put on the ground and then the animal is divided up and the head is put in the front with a foreleg and hind leg on either side and singed intestines in the middle. This is all 'offered' to Pong *rum*, and

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

"I begin with my personal servant Changzhi, whom I have had for twenty-five years. His father was the first servant we engaged on first coming to Kalimpong. In almost every characteristic he was an older edition of the son. He was with us until his death in 1912, when the son, then at the plough, succeeded him. The first characteristic of Changzhi is his honesty and truthfulness. In all these years I have never known him tell a lie to me or take anything that was not his own. I have never kept anything locked up from him, nor in matters of money kept an account of what I have entrusted to him: he did that. He would never take anything for himself without being told by me to do so, and I have known him disobey me in this in cases when he thought it was for my interest to keep something a little longer. I have, of course, known Lepcha servants who could not have been treated in this way; but I believe that Europeans in our district trust the Lepchas generally. If they fail, I believe that it is not infrequently through taking alcoholic liquors. On the other hand, I have known Nepalese domestics who have been quite trustworthy. The failures have been more numerous than among the Lepchas, and here again drink has been still more frequently the cause. Among the young Nepali men in the towns, it is pathetic how many who had promising futures have been ruined through drink.

"Another characteristic of the Lepchas is their generous and charitable nature: Changzhi shares this to the full. The fact that they lived an isolated life among the forests of the Himalayas before the Nepalese invaded their sanctuary made them interdependent. They were not good farmers and their agricultural implements were primitive. Their dependence upon forest roots and fruits, which were got free by the labour of their hands, encouraged the gospel of sharing; and they share everything. Shortly after we came to India we tried by our 'Young Men's Society' to develop an interest in social questions. One night the subject was debt and the cause of it among the Lepchas. One man said that in his opinion it arose through their stomachs: 'In the

241 olden days our fathers got their food from the forest; but
574 times change; forest regulations were framed against us, and
735 we had to buy our food. When friends called we could not refrain from sharing what we had with them, with the result that our year's store got consumed before the new crop was ready, and we had to go to the mahajan's shop and take it from him at an exorbitant rate of interest; and before we realised it we had become his slaves for life. There were no government rules against disposing of our land to others. We Lepchas were poor and we had to sell to the more thrifty Nepalese at a ridiculously low price.'

241 "That is how much of the Lepchas' land was acquired
425 by Nepalese. Rules preventing the transfer to Nepalese except by the personal ruling of the Deputy Commissioner have largely stopped this evil. The Lepchas, however, have learned much from the Nepalese as to the tillage of the land, and many of them are now quite as good farmers as their instructors.

484 "Another incident occurs to me from the 'Young Men's'
415 meetings on much the same subject. The point I would give
574 is on the reasons why the Nepalese are still, as then, more thrifty than the Lepchas. One young man said: 'Have you ever seen the different sizes of the cooking vessels used by the Lepchas and the Nepalese on a journey? The Lepcha carries one which could cook for a family and will share with any fellow-traveller in need: the Nepali carried a little pot just sufficient for his own use; and even if his father were beside him he would not ask him to take a little.'

"This was doubtless an exaggeration; but speaking generally it does reveal an undoubted difference between the two peoples.

782 "Another fruitful cause of poverty among the Lepchas is
735 their sacrifice of cattle and fowls on the advice of their priests in times of illness. Until that is stopped by the deliverance from the fear of evil spirits the Lepchas will remain poor. I have known it in times of prolonged and frequent illness in a family that every animal they have was

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

of this offering is known as *Chandong*. It was put on a winnowing-tray, on top of which an old piece of red cloth had been spread, the whole being then placed in position on the altar.

Pom-Ri is seventy-two, and has recently married the second Dorje-Lopön. She said that this particular part of the ceremony was always done by a female Mun; but she could give no reason for this. After placing the eggs in position she took each one in turn and pressed it to her forehead, just as Gongyop had done. She said, however, that she was not using them for divination but was merely dedicating them to Konchen.

A tray of burning juniper was now brought and put on the ground to one side of the altar. This was to dissolve the clouds on the mountain, in order that the god might see the sacrifice. It was ineffective, however, for Konchen remained invisible throughout the day. Pom-Ri now took a small drinking cup, round the rim of which butter had been smeared. A female helper, also a Mun, stood at her side and ladled *chi* into her cup from time to time. Pom-Ri now started to chant, assisted by Kahlyeu, who sang more or less in unison with her. He is not himself a Mun, but likes to take part in these ceremonies. Whenever she sprinkled the *chi* from her cup he threw out a handful of grain from his cap, which he held all the time in his hand. Their incantations were almost inaudible, but I could distinctly hear the word "Konchen" uttered at the moment when *chi* and grain were cast away.

After about twenty minutes Pom-Ri and her two helpers turned round and continued their chanting facing down the valley. I was told that having propitiated Konchen they had now turned their attention to the demons of the plains.

While this ceremony was in progress a goat had been slaughtered in the bushes just behind. It was killed in the usual way, by thrusting a bamboo stake stuck into its heart. At the place where it was killed a fire was burning, on which the meat was lightly singed. The head, liver (impaled on a stick),

342
351
133

Typical Lepcha homestead.

241
291

Sowing dry rice.

342
356
417
291

Re-thatching a house.

[Facing p. 172]

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

crops of which only small quantities are required at a time are grown. This also serves as a latrine, and is in consequence much frequented by the pigs and dogs, which here perform the function of scavengers. It sometimes happens that a man's main fields are situated round about his house, but these are generally at a distance and often scattered; for cardamoms, the chief source of wealth of the Lepchas, seem to thrive best in the bottom of the valley, whereas millet and maize may be successfully raised on the almost precipitous hillsides far above the village.

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

241 The following calendar shows the arrangement of agricultural work throughout the year. It starts with February, which is the first month of the Tibetan year:

February:	Clear ground and sow buckwheat in the lower parts of the valley.
March:	Clear ground and sow dry rice, millet, and a little maize.
April:	Clear ground in the higher places and sow more dry rice, millet, barley and wheat; the last two being sown together as a mixed crop.
May:	Reap buckwheat, and sow more millet and maize.
June:	Plant rice terraces. Weed dry rice. This is the worst month for food shortage.
July:	Sow more millet and also buckwheat. General weeding.
August:	Reap the first rice terraces, and prepare drying sheds for cardamoms. Sow more buckwheat.
September:	Reap dry rice and cardamoms. This is done mostly by the men, as it is heavy work. At the same time the women reap the millet.
October:	Sow barley and wheat, also onions. Continue reaping the cardamom crop.
November:	Clear ground for buckwheat. Make arrangements to sell the cardamom harvest.
December:	Continue to dispose of cardamoms. Women start to prepare the ground for buckwheat. This is the slackest month of the year.
January:	Sow buckwheat.

* * * * *

585 Most marriages take place in October, November, and December, as during these three months money and plenty of 005 food are available, and work is light. House-building and

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

amongst Nepalis for years. They are not, however, regarded, except in the case of cardamoms; and only then "because a wandering mendicant brought the first plants from Nepal, and these instructions were given with them."

Every cardamom field has a small erection in one corner. It is called *Mung Li* (Devil's house), and looks like a square beehive on legs. It is made for the accommodation of a devil called Thyok Dum, whose chief joy appears to be the destruction of cardamom plants. If given a house, however, he causes no damage.

Rice, *chi*, maize, meat and fish, together with a few coins, are placed in the house twice each year; just before the rice and barley harvests. These offerings remain in position until changed. Anyone who can read, but not a Lama, may place the offering in position; and with the exception of this particular person, no one should approach nearer than several yards to the *Mung Li* or he will be taken seriously ill. These erections are found only in cardamom fields; other crops being considered to have no need of such protection.

* * * * *

It is believed that agriculture in general was introduced into Lingtem by the mythical inhabitants of Mayel, a place on the slopes of Kinchinjunga which it is no longer possible to reach. There are in Mayel seven men and seven women, who live in seven houses. They are children at dawn and old people at night; but they never grow older in years. They have, moreover, the peculiar property of being invisible, except during the first few hours of each day. They would seem also to have solved the problem of birth control, for no babies have ever been born in Mayel.

It is said in Lingtem that the people of Mayel built the Maharaja's original palace in Fyung-Di, the walls of which are still standing. When they had completed the work they started to return, going by way of the Teesta and Talung valleys, and were followed by the progenitors of the Lepcha tribe. The whole party went along quite happily until they

11:Hermanns M-5 (1951)1954
AK5 Lepcha AK5

that is the case I will no longer stay with you." Henceforth he wandered alone until he came to a plain where he made his abode.[42]

According to another legend, man springs from a pair of deities or from deified ancestors. The above-mentioned Tak-bo-thing and Nasong-ngyu belong to the category of these deified ancestors. The old woman, Han-bu-ni, who is Mun and Andshemu told me this, "Sa-dzug-rum is the god of heaven and the sun. His wife is Gor-song-mu, that is the mother of Gor-song, because she has a son by that name. She also has a daughter. Sa-dzug-rum is like a father and mother of mankind. I offer sacrifices to him three times each year after the rice, corn and millet harvests. The animal most suitable for the sacrifice is the pig. The next best is the bullock or cow, and the goat ranks last. The pig is killed by piercing its heart from under the shoulder-blade. The cattle are killed by a blow with an axe on the back of the neck. The goats have their throats cut.

Another pair of deities are Kang-chen-rum, who lives in Himal, and his wife, Nyo-lig-rum, who lives in the sea. They have two children; the son, Dju-kōb, and the daughter, Bi-kōb. But the highest of all these gods is Sa-dzug-rum."

Thus this old Mun and Andshemu regards Sa-dzug-rum as their Supreme God, and believes that he has a wife. She however disagrees about calling Gor-song the first man. She also denies that Dju-kōb and Bi-kōb were the ancestral parents of the tribe. However she was unable to give us the names of the first men.

Sa-liang, the son and pupil of the famous Bong-thing Ong-di, contradicted her and related the following, "The Supreme God is Sa-dzug-rum. He has no wife, but four assistants. These are the four spirits who bring discord and pain into the world. They have therefore to be appeased by sacrifices performed twice a year. Sa-dzug-rum is not the god of creation. Rather, it is Rum who is the god of creation. He it was who created the first human beings, Ti-gung and Ni-gung. For a while they were serenely happy and were free from anxiety and suffering. Later they sinned, and as a

42. cfr. a similar myth quoted above p. 7.

11:Hermanns M-5 (1951)1954
AK5 Lepcha AK5

776 [782]

renders homage to the god of the hunters in order that he may obtain his protection.

The following sacrifices which are associated with agriculture and the harvest are of a completely different type. We have already had occasion to mention Se-dyu, the goddess of farming. She elects women only and passes on from mother to daughter. The women perform sacrifices in her honour at least twice a year—before the sowing in the springtime and after the harvest in autumn.

796 782

The pig and the cock serve as sacrificial victims. For this sacrifice the pig comes first in the order of preference, while in the ceremonies described above we have seen that the bull is given the special preference. The understanding of this factor helps to dispel the apparent contradiction that exists in the opposing claims of some Lepchas who maintain that the pig is the most valued of all animals and others who assert that the cattle are the most valued. It all depends on the type of sacrifice which is being offered at a particular moment. In the very early days they did not employ cattle to plough with ; cattle were harnessed very much later. The sacrifice is performed inside the house in a corner. The man can be present if a woman performs the sacrifice, and the man can even perform the sacrifice when the woman is, for some reason, prevented from performing it.

[231 241]

Apart from these private sacrifices to the god of agriculture, there are also ceremonies performed at festivals and solemnised by all. There are spring and autumn sacrifices. These are associated with the ancestors of Mayal, who as we saw earlier, provided mankind with the first seeds, and instructed them about the manner of cultivation. "The people of Mayal are worshipped exclusively in connection with the crops of rice, millet and maize ; on all other occasions they are markedly excluded from the long list of supernaturals who are called on to partake of the sacrifices and give their blessings. Everybody must worship them on two occasions, after the completion of the sowing and at the harvesting of the dry rice ; in these houses where there is a Mun or a knowledgeable old man, they are also prayed to in the winter to keep away snow and hail, in the spring to protect young crops and

11:Hermanns M-5 (1951)1954
AK5 Lepcha AK5

after the sowing of each of their grains, they are offered sakyou-faat to ensure a good harvest.

Only the three crops are connected with the people of Mayal; the others come from different supernaturals, barley, wheat, buckwheat, and wet rice come from Kongen-bu, the god of Kinchenjunga, a Sikkimese deity; no important ceremonies are connected with these crops. Cardamum, as has already been said, comes from Nepal and is under the patronage of the foreign Elaiji-nyou, who dislikes women, in particular menstruating women. The people of Mayal are said to share this dislike and should a menstruating woman visit them there would be the terrible result that all the people of Mayal would fall asleep and would not send the migratory birds."[71]

The spring sacrifice is simple. The autumn sacrifice on the contrary is very copious. For this an old experienced man is elected to represent the ancestors of Mayal and he is called Mayal-mu. A woman is selected to represent the Talyeu-mu, the sister earth. When the ceremony cannot be completed on the same day, those taking part in it stay with each other for the night. There is free intercourse between the sexes; however, the comprehensive ban on incestual relations is not broken. This recalls the sexual freedom which is indulged in at the festivals of Spring and Autumn among many Asiatic peoples and which we observed in the Tibeto-Chinese province Tsing-hai among Chinese, Tujen Tibetans, etc. The representation of ancestors and agricultural spirits by masquerading in their guise is again a well-known custom among Asiatic primitives usually connected with the New Year festivals. Thus the sacrifices of the hunters and of the cultivators stand out in sharp contrast with each other.

The Lepcha, Suliman, gave us informatin about another family sacrifice to the Supreme God, Ta-she-thing. Anyone who knows the rites may perform it, whether it be a man or a woman. The one who performs it must fast for three days before the ceremony, *i.e.* he must not eat the chief meal of rice but he can eat the other dishes. During this time he must take three baths. The bathing place is prepared near the

71. Gorer, op. cit. 238 sq.

11:Hermanns M-5 (1951)1954
AK5 Lepcha AK5

411 Another weapon commonly used by the Rong is the knife Bakob. It has a straight blade and a gradually narrowing wooden hilt.

The Rong tribesman, in striking contrast to the other peoples, always carries his knife on his right hip while the [145] others carry the Nepalese Kukuri on the left hip. The knife is the instrument most commonly used by the Lepchas. It serves to cut down trees, to divide the game and for countless other purposes.

224 That, in brief, is the equipment of the Lepcha hunters and their temperament. We have already seen how all this is linked with religion, *viz.* by the performance of sacrifices and the description of the hunt-deities. The Rong, or at least a part [174] of them, have been, without doubt, originally, purely hunters. This belief is confirmed by Gorer, "According to Kahlyeu, (and the tradition is supported by others) until the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Lepcha were entirely nomadic, only building temporary huts and travelling about the forests, living on such animals they could kill, and wild plants of which the Lepcha have considerable knowledge, for they know the edible (but not, as European tradition believes, the medicinal) properties of nearly every plant and tree. Iron for knives, Kahlyeu says, was introduced in the time of his father's grandfather, that is to say, the first half of the eighteenth century. About a generation later the Lepcha started living in permanent houses and were able to hold or increase their stock [23] of domestic animals. Private property in the land must have developed somewhat later."[108]

● 241 773 Besides being hunters the Rong are also farmers. According to their legends they obtained their first seeds of dry rice, millet, maize and gurkins from their ancestral spirits in Mayal. They came as hunters to the land of their ancestors and were asked whether they possessed any grains for food. As they replied in the negative, they were given grain with instruction about its cultivation. At first, rice was used only for sacrificial purposes. They could only test whether the rice was ready by biting it with their teeth, and when they did so they found that the rice was sweet, and henceforward they began to eat rice as a food.

108. Gorer, op. cit. p. 60 sq.

11:Hermanns M-5 (1951)1954
AK5 Lepcha AK5

rice as a food. The fact that the offering of sacrifices to the deities concerned with farming was preponderantly a woman's concern, leads us to conclude that farming was originally the work of the women. In the olden days the fields were burnt out in order to prepare them for the plantation. Part of the forest was burnt, cleaned up, and the cultivation of grain would be carried on for one or two years, after which the tribesmen would move away to another area. This is known as shifting cultivation. Today, the burning of fields is controlled by government, lest too much damage be done to the forests. The permanent field system is the common practice today. (Fig. 25-27)

The Rong originally dug up their fields with the use of the hoe, and they did not use the plough. They have taken over the plough only recently from the Indians and the Nepalese. The Lepcha's knowledge of farming was very elementary and they could by no means compete with the Indian and Nepalese farmers. There was a reason behind this. The Lepchas were not totally dependent for their existence on farming, for the collection of roots and plants, and hunting, offered them rich sources of nourishment. A little cattle-breeding goes hand in hand with farming. They keep a few cattle and goats ; sheep are kept very seldom, and at the most one or two pigs. The cattle are the mountain Zebu. The humps of these animals are feebly developed, but for the rest they are strong animals. The Zebu are generally of a black colour. The goats are of a poor variety and have no special breed. The pig, which is different in shape from the black Chinese pig, has as its forbear the black Himalayan boar. The stomach of the pig does not hang down low ; it has small erect ears, a strong mane of bristles, and a long and pointed head. A Lepcha who is well off keeps about eight to ten cattle, and among these are two pairs of oxen for cultivation. The other animals are milk cows and calves. The milk provided by these animals is used mainly for tea ; but occasionally butter is made from it. The number of goats reared is also not very large—ranging from ten to fifteen among the richer folk. The cattle and goats are driven to the grassy slopes for grazing throughout the day and in the evening they return to their stalls. (Fig. 28)

11:Hermanns M-5 (1951)1954
AK5 Lepcha AK5

dress is with sleeves) held with a girdle, and a jacket over it. The head gear consists of a cloth worn in the manner of the Nepalese women. The old head-dress for the men was a thimble-shaped hat woven from bamboo; see book-cover. (Fig. 33-36).

The Rong folk wear rings, bracelets, and necklaces as ornaments. But one will never come across a case of a Rong wearing any ornamentation to the nose, the feet and the toes. The most common implement used by the women is the sickle. A bent sickle hook-shaped at the upper end is called bahur in the Lepcha tongue, and kurpa in Nepalese. It is used for cutting wood and the branches of trees. Another kind of sickle, in the shape of a half moon, is called angsu (sikal in Nepalese) and is used to mow grass and weeds. The third type has a toothed edge, and is used as a kind of saw. It is called angsu in Lepcha and ancher in Nepalese. A girl is given her sickle at the age of seven or eight, and the boy his knife, so that from a very early age they may be able to practise the use of the most universal of instruments. Usually it is carried in the belt at the back. (Fig. 37-44)

The most important of the implements used for farming is the wide shovel-like hoe, and it is used for loosening the earth and clearing it of weeds. There are in addition two or three pronged hoes used for loosening the earth and relieving it of weeds.

The plough has been taken over from the Nepalese. It consists of a horn shaped piece of wood, which is tipped by the iron ploughshare. The drawing beam goes up from the centre and above is the plough handle with a handle to steer with. The beam is fixed to the yoke which is drawn by two oxen.

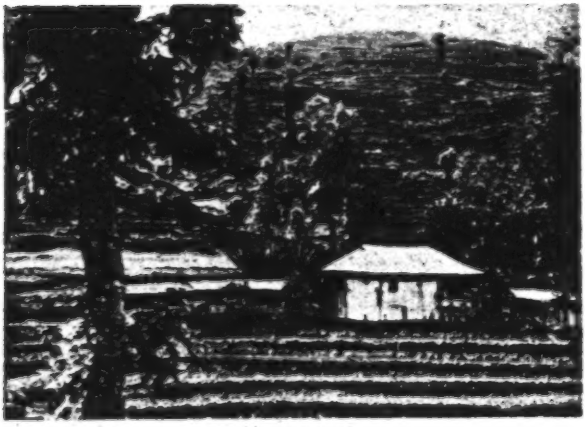
The economy of the Rong corresponds entirely with that of the other mountain peoples of South-East Asia and South China, *e.g.* the Miau. They were originally hunters who have taken over to farming. They have certainly not learnt the old agricultural economy from other peoples, but they absorbed into themselves the people who practised the arts of farming. Domestic animals are reared mainly for the purpose of sacrifice and not for any economic gain, and they are of the greatest importance. The combination of hunting with

11:Hermanns M-5 (1951)1954
AK5 Lepcha AK5

298
412
313

39. Lepcha girl cutting bamboo

241
133
343
137



40. Cultivations of the Rai

[End Plate 16]